

# Tsonga language

**Tsonga** (/ˈtsɒŋɡə, ˈtsɔː-/) or **Xitsonga** (Tsonga: *Xitsonga*), is a Bantu language spoken by the Tsonga people. It is mutually intelligible with Tswa and Ronga and the name "Tsonga" is often used as a cover term for all three, also sometimes referred to as Tswa-Ronga. The Xitsonga language has been standardized for both academic and home use, making it the base language for the Tsonga people. As with many other languages, there are various dialects within the Tsonga language group.

Contents
<b>History</b>
<b>Etymology</b>
<b>Languages and dialects</b>
<b>Official status</b>
<b>Phonology</b>
Vowels
Consonants
<b>Grammar</b>
Tenses
Noun classes
Personal pronouns
Verbs
Proverbs
Numerals
Months of the Year
<b>Vocabulary</b>
<b>Writing system</b>
Xitsonga Latin Alphabet
Xiyinhlanharhu xa Mipfawulo
<b>References</b>
<b>Further reading</b>
<b>External links</b>
Software and localisation

## History

The Xitsonga language was studied in great detail by the Swiss missionary, Henri-Alexandre Junod between the year 1890 and 1920, who made the conclusion that the Xitsonga language (which he called the "Thonga language" at the time) began to develop in Mozambique even before the 1400s. In his own words, Junod states the following:<sup>[5]</sup>

My conclusion is then that the Thonga language was already-spoken by the primitive occupants of the country more than 500 years ago and that, together with a certain number of customs, it formed the great bond which bound the Thonga clans together in past centuries.

Further studies were carried out by Junod and other Swiss missionaries such as Henri Berthoud and Ernest Creux, who began to unify the language in order to have a standard way of writing and reading. "Shigwamba" was a term used by the missionaries in order to group the language under a unified identity, however the name was unfamiliar to many of the Tsonga people and had to be replaced with "Thonga/Tsonga". Harries makes reference to this:<sup>[6]</sup>

As the term Gwamba was unknown outside the Spelonken, Henri Berthoud recommended that the mission abandon the term and replace it with the widely accepted genericism, Tonga/Thonga.

Tsonga	
Xitsonga	
Native to	Mozambique, South Africa, Eswatini, Zimbabwe
Region	Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Gaza Province, Maputo Province, Maputo City, Chiredzi District, Mwenenzi District
Ethnicity	Tsonga
Native speakers	12 million <span> </span> (2006–2011) <sup>[1]</sup> <p>3.4 million L2 speakers in South Africa (2002)<sup>[2]</sup></p>
Language family	<div>Niger–Congo <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li> Atlantic–Congo<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Volta-Congo<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Benue–Congo<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Bantoid<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Southern Bantoid<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Bantu<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Southern Bantu<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Tswa–Ronga<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Tsonga</b></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></div>
Writing system	Latin (Tsonga alphabet) <p>Tsonga Braille</p>
Signed forms	Signed Tsonga
Official status	
Official language <span> </span> in	<span><span></span></span> South Africa <div><span><span></span></span> Zimbabwe (as 'Shangani')</div>
Recognised minority language <span> </span> in	<span><span></span></span> Mozambique
Language codes	
ISO 639-1	ts ( <span>https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?iso_639_1=ts</span> )
ISO 639-2	tso ( <span>https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?code_ID=460</span> )
ISO 639-3	tso
Glottolog	tson1249 ( <span>http://glottolog.org/res</span>

Swiss missionaries engaged with the Tsonga people and used their assistance to translate the Bible from English and Sesotho into the Tsonga language. Paul Berthoud published the first book in 1883 which came as a result of the help he received from the translations by Mpapele (Mbizana) or Mandlati (Zambiki). The two men were active in teaching and translating the language to the missionaries since none of the missionaries were familiar with it and had to dedicate much of their time to learn it. The language of the Tsonga people and the dialects were put into print and the first books were published. The language was later on finally registered as "Xitsonga" within the Constitution of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) and it was declared an official language. The standardization of the Xitsonga language as a result made it possible for the Tsonga people to develop a common way of speaking and writing.

- Xitsonga Famous Surnames
1. Baloyi 2. Chauke 3. Chavalala 4. Mabunda 5. Maluleke 6. Makamu 7. Mathevula 8. Ngoveni 9. Nkuna 10. Shibambu (Xivambu) 11. Shikweni 12. Rikhotso 13. Zitha 14. Mashava 15. Hlangwani (Mapengo/Mahlaule) 16. Ngomani 17. Mukarhi 18. Rivombo 19. Makonzo 20. Manyisa 21. Mashele

## Etymology

The name "Tsonga" is the root of Xitsonga (culture, language or ways of the Tsonga), Mutsonga (a Tsonga person), Vatsonga (Tsonga people), etc. In the language of the Vatsonga themselves, the root never appears by itself. It is Tsonga for the ease and accessibility of the wider international community.

As for the origins of the name, there are three theories. The first states that Tsonga is another pronunciation for Dzonga, which means "South" and also the name of one of the dialects of Xitsonga. The second theory is that it is an alternate spelling of the old ancestral name of the Chopi and Tembe groups, Tonga/Thonga.<sup>[7]</sup> The other Zulu explanation for the alternative spelling of "Thonga" is that the Tembe and Rhonga people, who were the first to arrive at the Delagoa Bay and around the Natal Bay, transitioned the Rhonga "Rh" into the Zulu form of "Th". An example is **rhuma** (Tsonga word for "send") becomes **thuma** (Zulu word for the same action). The third and most accepted is that it is another pronunciation for "Rhonga", the root for the word "vurhonga" for east or the direction where the sun rises. Vurhonga also means dawn in Xitsonga. Rhonga (commonly and wrongly spelt as Ronga) is one of the Tsonga languages. The physical evidence of most Tsonga people residing along the eastern coast of Africa in the south, extending inland in a westward direction, makes this explanation especially inviting.

Much of the history about the Tsonga people had been overlooked and thus much history regards the aftermath of the mfecane where the Nguni people overran many of the pre-existing African tribes of South Africa, Eswatini, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. In the 1800s many European writers documented many of the events that dominated in the Shaka Zulu era and the Tsonga history was largely overlooked in favor of Nguni conquests.

## Languages and dialects

Tsonga people and languages are: Chopi, Gwamba, Nda, Ronga, Tonga and Tswa.

Among these languages, three language groups can be identified. These are S50 (Tswa-Ronga group), S60 (Chope group), and Nda language (S15), currently falling under the Shona group (S10). In total there are six recognised languages.

### Chopi Group

1. Chopi (Chope, Copi, Tshopi, Txopi) dialects are Copi, Khambani, Lambwe, Lenge (Lengue), Ndonge and Tonga.
2. Tonga (Nyembane, Nyembani, Inhambane).

### Nda Group

1. Nda (Ndzawu, Njao, Sofala, South-East Shona) dialects are Changa (Shanga, Xanga), Danda, Dondo, Gova, Nda, and

### Tswa-Ronga Group

1. Ronga (Rhonga) dialects are Kalanga, Konde, Putru, and Ssonge.
2. Gwamba (Gwapa) dialects are Bila (Vila), Djonga (Dzonga, Jonga), Hlanganu (Langanu, Nhlanganu), Hlave (Mbayi, Nkuna, Pai), Kande, Khosa, Luleke, N'walungu (Ngwalungu), Nkuma, Songa, Valoyi, Xika, and Xonga.
3. Tswa (Tshwa) dialects are Dzibi (Dzivi), Dzibi-Dzonga (Dzivi-Dzonga), Tshwa, Hlengwe (Lengwe, Lhenge), Khambani, Makwakwe-Khambani, Mandla, Ndxhonge, and Nhayi (Nyai, Nyayi).

Some dialects are subdialects but have been mentioned here for completeness. For example, Valoyi and Luleke comprise the N'walungu dialect. There is no Gwamba dialect as Gwamba is another name for Xitsonga itself. Formally Xitsonga has been called Gwamba. Tswa-Ronga dialects not considered part of the family include Pulana (Xipulana, Sepulane). What is commonly referred to as "Shangana/Changana" is not a recognized language in South Africa and is not a dialect that falls within the Xitsonga language group, as its distinctiveness stems mainly from the use of the Nguni language and grammar. The vocabulary of a true dialect derives from the same language group, while its words are pronounced or written differently. Therefore the Nguni influence cannot be used as a basis to define dialects within the Xitsonga language group. References to these Shangana forms of speech should be classified as influences from the Lala, Zunda, and Ngoni language groups.

	ource/languoid/id/tson1249) <sup>[3]</sup>
Guthrie code	S.53 (S.52) <sup>[4]</sup>
Linguasphere	99-AUT-dc (http://linguasphere.info/?page=linguасcale&linguacode=99-AUT-dc) incl. varieties 99-AUT-dca...-dcg



Only six (6) Thonga/Tsonga dialects exist and these were identified by the dawn of the 1900s. These are namely xiRonga, xiHlanganu, xiBila, xiDjonga, xiN'walungu, and xiHlengwe. All other variations within South Africa are sub-dialects of the aforementioned. The dialects most spoken in the rural communities of Limpopo are the N'walungu, Bila, Hlengwe, and the Hlanganu dialects. The Xitsonga vocabulary and phonetic permutations are also largely based on these dialects (cf. Junod 1912, p. 470-473)

For "language of", the various languages and dialects employ one or more of the following prefixes: Bi-, Chi-, Ci-, Gi-, Ici-, Ki-, Ma-, Shee-, Shi-, Txi-, Va-, Wa-, and Xi-. For "people of", they use either "Ba-" or "Va-".

## Official status

Tsonga is an official language in South Africa. It has been suggested that Zimbabwe's new constitution should include it as an official language. All Tswa-Ronga languages are recognised in Mozambique. It is not official in Eswatini (formerly Swaziland).

## Phonology

Tsonga has a distinction between modal and breathy voiced consonants: /b<sup>h</sup>, bv<sup>h</sup>, v<sup>h</sup>, d<sup>h</sup>, dʒ<sup>h</sup>, dʒ<sup>h</sup>, g<sup>h</sup>/ vs /b, bv, v, d, dʒ, dʒ, g/ among the obstruents (the one exception being /ɓ/), and /m̤, n̤, ŋ̤, ɹ̤, ʝ̤, w̤/ vs /m, n, ŋ, r, j, w/ among the sonorants (the one exception being /ɲ/).

## Vowels

	<b>Front</b>	<b>Central</b>	<b>Back</b>
<b><u>Close</u></b>	i, ɪ, iː		u, uː
<b><u>Mid</u></b>	e~ɛ, ẽ, eː	(ə̃)	o~ɔ, oː
<b><u>Open</u></b>		a, ă, aː	

Mid vowels can vary from close-mid to open-mid. It also has a distinction between allophones of vowels ranging from oral to nasal (e.g. [ẽ] is an allophone of /e/).

## Consonants

[illegible]

		<u>Labial</u>		<u>Labio-dental</u>	<u>Dental</u>		<u>Alveolar</u>				<u>Lateral</u>		<u>Post-alveolar</u>		<u>Velar</u>		<u>Glottal</u>		
		plain	pal.		plain	lab.	plain	lab.	wstld.	pal.	plain	lab.	plain	lab.	plain	lab.	plain	lab.	pal.
<u>Click</u>	voiceless				l														
	aspirated				l <sup>h</sup>	l <sup>h</sup> w													
	voiced				g l	g l w													
<u>Stop</u>	voiceless	p	p <sup>j</sup>				t	t <sup>w</sup>		t <sup>j</sup>	tl	tl <sup>w</sup>			k	k <sup>w</sup>			
	aspirated	p <sup>h</sup>	p <sup>h</sup> j				t <sup>h</sup>	t <sup>h</sup> w		t <sup>h</sup> j	tl <sup>h</sup>	tl <sup>h</sup> w			k <sup>h</sup>	k <sup>h</sup> w			
	voiced	b	b <sup>j</sup>				d	d <sup>w</sup>		d <sup>j</sup>	dl	dl <sup>w</sup>			g	g <sup>w</sup>			
	breathy	b <sup>h</sup>	b <sup>h</sup> j				d <sup>h</sup>								g <sup>h</sup>	g <sup>h</sup> w			
<u>Nasal</u>	voiced	m	m <sup>j</sup>	(m)	(n)		n	n <sup>w</sup>					ɲ	ɲ <sup>w</sup>	ŋ	ŋ <sup>w</sup>			
	breathy	m <sup>h</sup>					n <sup>h</sup>	n <sup>h</sup> w							ŋ <sup>h</sup>	ŋ <sup>h</sup> w			
<u>Affricate</u>	voiceless			ɸ <sup>f</sup>			ts	ts <sup>w</sup>	ts <sup>ɸ</sup>				tʃ	tʃ <sup>w</sup>					
	aspirated			ɸ <sup>h</sup>			ts <sup>h</sup>	ts <sup>w</sup> h	ts <sup>ɸ</sup> h				tʃ <sup>h</sup>	tʃ <sup>h</sup> w					
	voiced			ɸ <sup>v</sup>			dz		dz <sup>β</sup>		dʒ		dʒ	dʒ <sup>w</sup>					
	breathy			ɸ <sup>v</sup> h			dz <sup>h</sup>	dz <sup>h</sup> w					dʒ <sup>h</sup>						
<u>Fricative</u>	voiceless	ɸ		f			s	s <sup>w</sup>	s <sup>ɸ</sup>		ɬ	ɬ <sup>w</sup>	ʃ	ʃ <sup>w</sup>	x	x <sup>w</sup>			
	voiced	β		v			z	z <sup>w</sup>					ʒ				ɦ	ɦ <sup>w</sup>	ɦ <sup>j</sup>
	breathy			v <sup>h</sup>															
<u>Trill</u>	voiced						r	r <sup>w</sup>											
	breathy						r <sup>h</sup>	r <sup>h</sup> w											
<u>Approximant</u>	voiced										l	l <sup>w</sup>	j	ɥ		w			
	breathy												j <sup>h</sup>			w <sup>h</sup>			

Different consonant sounds may alternate the place of articulation. The click consonant sounds may alternate from being dental to alveolar; /l, l<sup>h</sup>, l<sup>h</sup> w, g l, g l w/ to /l, l<sup>h</sup>, l<sup>h</sup> w, g l, g l w/. A number of Tsonga speakers may alternate affricate sounds from alveolar to retroflex; /ts, ts<sup>h</sup>, dz, dz<sup>h</sup>, dz<sup>h</sup> w/ to /tʃ, tʃ<sup>h</sup>, dʒ, dʒ<sup>h</sup>, dʒ<sup>h</sup> w/. The latter are weakly whistled in both Tsonga proper and Changana dialect. Many consonants can be prenasalised as well. Labiodental and dental nasal consonants only occur in various consonant clusters.<sup>[8]</sup>

Unlike some of the Nguni languages, Tsonga has very few words with click consonants, and these vary in place between dental and postalveolar. Examples are: ngqondo (mind), gqoka (wear/dress), guqa (kneel), riqingo (phone), qiqi (earring), qamba (compose), Mugqivela (Saturday).

## Grammar

The grammar is generally typical of Bantu languages with a subject–verb–object order. The structure changes to subject—object—verb when addressing another person:

Tsonga	English
Ndza ku rhandza	I you love (I love you)
Wa ndzi rhandza	You love me
Ha ku tiva	We know you
Va ndzi tiva	They know me

## Tenses

### Present tense

The present tense is formed by simply using the personal pronoun along with the verb.

Ndzi lava mali – I want money,

Hi tirha siku hinkwaro – We work all day,

Mi(u) lava mani? – Who are you looking for?

U kota ku famba – S/He knows how to walk.

### Present progressive

Generally, to indicate ongoing actions in the present one takes the personal pronoun, drops the 'i' and adds 'a'.

Ndzi nghena (e)ndlwini – I am entering the house,

Ha tirha sweswi – We are working right now,

Ma hembra – You (plural) are lying,

Wa hemba – You (singular) are lying,  
 Wa hemba – S/He is lying,  
 With the plural 'va' (they) there is no difference. Thus 'va hemba' = they lie AND they are lying.

### Past tense

This is for in one of three ways, depending on the word.

(i) Generally, one drops the 'a' from the verb and adds the prefix '-ile'

Ndzi ngenile ndlwini – I entered the house,  
 Hi tirhile siku hinkwaro – We worked all day,  
 U hembile – You lied,  
 U hembile – S/He lied,  
 Va hembile – They lied.

(ii) With verbs that end with -ala, the past tense changes to -ele or -ale.

ku rivala – to forget,  
 Ndzi rivele – I forgot, U rivele – you forgot, Va rivele – they forgot,  
 Ku nyamalala – To disappear,  
 U nyamalarile – S/He – disappeared,  
 Words used to describe a state of being also use the past tense.  
 Ku karhala – To be tired,  
 Ndzi karhele – I am tired, U karhele – S/He is tired, Va karhele – They are tired.

(iii) In many cases merely changing the last 'a' in the verb to an 'e' indicates past action.

Ku fika – To arrive,  
 U fike tolo – S/He arrived yesterday,  
 Ndzi fike tolo – I arrived yesterday,  
 Hi tirhe siku hinkwaro – We worked all day,  
 Ndzi nghene (e)ndlwini – I entered the house.

### Future tense

This is formed by the adding 'ta' in between the personal pronoun and the verb.

Ndzi ta nghena (e)ndlwini – I will enter the house,  
 Hi ta tirha siku hinkwaro – We will work all day,  
 Va ta tirha siku hinkwaro – They will work all day,  
 Mi ta tirha siku hinkwaro – You (plural) will work all day.

## Noun classes

Tsonga has several classes, much like other Bantu languages, which are learned through memorisation mostly. These are:

Class	Prefix	Examples
1	mu-	<i>mufana</i> "boy", <i>murhangeri</i> "leader", <i>munhu</i> "person"
2	va-	<i>vafana</i> "boys", <i>varhangeri</i> "leaders", <i>vanhu</i> "people"
3	mu-, m-, n-	<i>nseve</i> "arrow", <i>nenge</i> "leg", <i>nambu</i> "river"
4	mi-	<i>miseve</i> "arrows", <i>milenge</i> "legs", <i>milambu</i> "rivers"
5	ri-, Ø-	<i>tiko</i> "country", <i>rito</i> "word", <i>vito</i> "name"
6	ma-	<i>matiko</i> "countries", <i>marito</i> "words", <i>mavito</i> "names"
7	xi-	<i>Xikwembu</i> "God", <i>xilo</i> "thing", <i>xitulu</i> "chair"
8	swi-	<i>Swikwembu</i> "gods", <i>swilo</i> "things", <i>switulu</i> "chairs"
9	yi(n)-, (n)-	<i>yindlu</i> "house", <i>mbiyana</i> "dog", <i>homu</i> "cow"
10	tiyi(n), ti(n)-	<i>tiyindlu</i> "houses", <i>timbyana</i> "dogs", <i>tihomu</i> "cows"
11	ri-	<i>rihlaya</i> "jaw", <i>rivambu</i> "rib", <i>rintiho</i> "finger"
14	vu-	<i>vutomi</i> "life", <i>vumunhu</i> "humanness", <i>vululami</i> "righteousness"
15	ku-	<i>ku tshembha</i> "to trust", <i>ku dya</i> "to eat", <i>ku biha</i> "ugliness"
21	dyi-	<i>dyimunhu</i> "abnormally huge person", <i>dyiyindlu</i> "abnormally huge house"

- In classes 9 and 10, yi is present when the noun stem has one syllable, and is absent otherwise.

## Personal pronouns

Personal pronouns in Tsonga are very similar to those of many other Bantu languages, with a few variations.

These may be classified as first person (the speaker), second person (the one spoken to), and third person (the one spoken about). They are also classified by grammatical number, i.e., singular and plural. There is no distinction between subject and object.

Each pronoun has a corresponding concord or agreement morpheme.

## Personal Pronouns

	1st sg.	2nd sg.	3rd sg.	1st pl.	2nd pl.	3rd pl.
<b>Pronoun</b>	mina	wena	yena	hina	n'wina	vona
<b>Agreement morpheme</b>	ndzi, ndza	u, wa	u, wa	hi, ha	mi, ma	va
<b>Example sentences</b>	Mina ndzi vona huku. ("I see a chicken.") Mina ndza yi vona huku. ("I see it—the chicken.")	Wena u vona huku. ("You see a chicken.") Wena wa yi vona huku. ("You see it—the chicken.")	Yena u vona huku. ("He/she sees a chicken.") Yena wa yi vona huku. ("He/she sees it—the chicken.")	Hina hi vona huku. ("We see a chicken.") Hina ha yi vona huku. ("We see it—the chicken.")	N'wina mi vona huku. ("You see a chicken.") N'wina ma yi vona huku. ("You see it—the chicken.")	Vona va vona huku. ("They see a chicken.") Vona va yi vona huku. ("They see it—the chicken.")

## Verbs

All verbs have the prefix "ku" and end with an 'a' in the infinitive, with a couple of exceptions.

Tsonga	English
ku chava	To fear
ku tsaka	To rejoice
ku rhandza	to love

The main exception to this is the verb "ku ri" – "to say" It corresponds to "ti" in many other bantu languages. Examples of its usage include:  
u ri yini? – What do you say? (What are you saying?)  
ndzi ri ka n'wina – I say to you all.

In many instances the "ri" is often omitted and thus "ku" on its own can also mean "say".  
Va ri ndza penga – They say I'm crazy.  
Va ri yini? – What do they say? (What are they saying?)

## Proverbs

Like many other languages, Xitsonga has many proverbs; these appear in different classes. They appear in a group of animals, trees and people.

Tsonga	English	Meaning
N'wana wa mfenhe a nga tsandziwi hi rhavi	The child of baboon does not fail a branch	A wiseman's child can do anything.
U nga teki mali u bohela enengeni wa mpfuvu	Do not tie money in the leg of hippopotamus	Do not lend your money to people who do not pay back.
U nga dlayi nyoka u yi ndzuluta, ta miclele ta ku vona	Do not kill a snake and swing it, the ones inside the holes are watching you	Do not do unnecessary bad things to someone, other people are watching you.
Kuwa ro tshwuka ri na xivungu endzeni.	A fig fruit which is pink, it has a worm inside.	Most of very beautiful women they have bad habits.
N'wana wa nyoka i nyoka.	The child of snake is a snake.	A child of a bad person, might be a very bad person.
Ndlopfu a yi fi hi rivambu rin'we	An elephant does not die of one (broken) rib	When in trouble, a man should try all efforts to find a solution.
Mbuti ya xihaha a yi tswaleli entlhambini	A secretive goat does not give birth in a midst.	Keep a secret do not say it where there are many people
Matimba ya ngwenya i mati	The strength of crocodile is water.	A man has power when he is supported by his people
N'hwarambirhi yin'we yi ta tshwa nkanga		If one tries to do more than one thing at the same time, one might not prosper.
N'wana wo ka a nga rili u ta fela a dzobyeni	A child who does not cry will die unnoticed at the back of his mother.	If you do not raise your voice (in a form of a complaint), you will not be heard.
Mbuti yi dya laha yi nga bohiwa kona	A goat eats where it is tied.	A person must use properties of a place where he is working.
Ku tlula ka mhala ku letela n'wana wa le ndzeni	The way an impala jumps, it influences its unborn child.	Whatever bad things a mother does, her daughter will also do.
I malebvu ya nghala.	It is a lion's beard.	A thing may not be as scary as it looks.
Nomu a wu taleriwi hi nambu	A mouth can cross any river.	A mouth can say all words of promises.
Mavoko ya munhu a ma mili nhova/byanyi	Grass cannot grow on a human being's hands.	You must work hard (in every possible way) to succeed.
Xandla famba, xandla vuya.	Let the hand go and let the hand come back.	A giving hand is a receiving hand.
Humba yi olele nkuma	The snail has collected ashes	A person has died
Mbyana loko yi lava ku ku luma ya n'wayitela.	A dog smiles when it intends to bite something.	A person can do (or intend to do) bad things to you, while he is smiling.
Ku hiwa hi Thomo ku suka e palamendhe ya le tilweni.	To be given by Thomo (king's name) from heavenly parliament.	To be blessed by God.
Vana va munhu va tsemelana nhloko ya njiya.	Siblings are sharing the head of locust.	Siblings must share good things.
Mhunti yo tlulatlula Mangulwe u ta yi khoma.	An antelope which is jumping around next to Mangulwe (dog's name), he will catch it.	Any girl who has been seen by this boy, she will accept his proposal (used by a boy when he is in love with a girl).
Tolo a nga ha vuyi.	Yesterday will not come back.	Wishing to bring interesting old things of old days to nowadays.
Nghala yi vomba exihlahleni.	A lion roars in the bush.	A warrior is seen in a war.
Ku hundza muti ri xile	To pass a home during the day	To be stupid
Tinghala timbirhi ta chavana.	Two lions fear each other.	Two powerful nations fear each other.
Timpfuvu timbirhi a ti tshami xidziveni xin'we.	Two hippos cannot stay in the same deep water.	Enemies cannot stay in the same place.
Vuhosi a byi peli nambu.	Chiefdom does not cross the river.	Chiefdom stays in the same family, cannot be passed to other families.
A ndzi ku hi laha ku nga na mpfula ku sala ndzhongo.	I thought is where the rain has poured and left fertile soil.	I thought it was good things.
I matutu vana va ntavasi		It is plenty.
Ku tshwa nomo	To have a burnt mouth	Referring to someone who constantly lies, e.g. Jephrey Cuma u tshwe nomo.
N'wana u tseme mubya		A disobedient child
Ximitantsengele xi tshemba nkolo	He who swallows a large stone has confidence in the size of his throat.	When you start something you must have power (courage) to complete it.
Mutlonthi wa tinyarhi ti vuya hi yena	The one who challenges buffaloes they will chase him.	He who provokes other people, will face the consequences.

Loko u tsundzuka mhelembe khandziya ensinyeni	When you think of rhino, climb a tree.	When you think of something, act immediately.
Ku ba ndlopfu hi xibakele	To hit an elephant with a fist	To make a very slight impression.
Ku banana hi rhambu ra mfenhe	To hit each other with a baboon's bone	To exchange gifts with relatives only.
Ku banana hi rhanga ro hisa	To hit each other with a hot 'pumpkin'	To accuse each other.
U nga hlawuli nkuku wa mhangele	One must not choose the male of the guinea-fowl (similar to "Don't count your chickens before they are hatched").	This proverb is said to a young husband who might be tempted to prepare something for their babies before their birth, since you do not know if the baby is a male or female.
Tinhlanga ta le ndzhaku ti tiviwa hi mutlhaveri wa tona.	The tattooing marks made on the back are known by the tattooer (not by the tattooed)	You do not know what may happen when you have turned your back.
Xihlovo a xi dungiwi loko u heta ku nwa mati	Do not close the well after having drunk.	Do not mess up things after using them, you might need them tomorrow.
U nga sahi nsinya hi vuxika, u ta tshwa hi mumu hi malanga	Do not cut the tree in winter, you will burn by sun in summer.	Do not mess up things when you do not need them, you will suffer when you need them.
Mhunti yi biwa ya ha ri na mahika	An antelope is killed while is sighing	A problem must be solved immediately.
Xirhami xi vuyisa na n'wana evukatini	Chillness causes a girl to come back to her parents' house from her husband's house.	It is very cold.

## Numerals

Tsonga	English
N'we	one
Mbirhi	two
Nharhu	three
Mune	four
Ntlhanu	five
Tsevu	six
Nkombo	seven
Nhungu	eight
Kaye	nine
Khume	ten
Khume (na) n'we / Khumen'we	eleven
Khume (na) mbirhi / Khumembirhi	twelve
Khume (na) nharhu / Khumenharhu	thirteen
Makhume mambirhi / Makumembirhi	twenty
Makhume manharhu / Makumenharhu	thirty
Mune wa makhume / Makumemune	forty
Ntlhanu wa makhume / Makumentlhanu	fifty
Dzana	hundred
Gidi	thousand

## Months of the Year



Tsonga	English
Sunguti	January
Nyenyenyani	February
Nyenyankulu	March
Dzivamisoko	April
Mudyaxihi	May
Khotavuxika	June
Mawuwani	July
Mhawuri	August
Ndzati	September
Nhlangula	October
Hukuri	November
N'wendzamhala	December

## Vocabulary

---

Xitsonga, like many other African languages, have been influenced by various European colonial languages. Xitsonga includes words borrowed from English, Afrikaans, and Portuguese. Also, due to the assimilation of the Shangaan nation, Xitsonga has taken some words from Nguni languages.

Words borrowed from English

- Thelevhixini (Mavonakule) – television
- Rhediyo (Xiyanimoya) – Radio
- Xitulu – chair (Stool)
- Wachi (Xikomba-nkarhi) – watch (to tell time)
- Movha (Xipandza-mananga) – car (automobile)
- Sokisi – socks
- Nghilazi – glass
- Tililoko – clock(bell)
- Masipala – municipal (plural: vamasipala)
- Makhiya/swikhiya (Xilotlela) – keys

Words borrowed from Afrikaans

- lekere – sweets (lekkers)
- fasitere – window (venster)
- lepula – spoon (lepel)
- kereke – church (kerk)
- buruku – trousers (broek)
- domu – idiot (dom)
- tafula – table (tafel)
- xipuku – ghost (spook)

Words borrowed from other Nguni languages:

- riqingho – phone
- ku qonda – to head towards (not standard = ku kongoma)
- ku gcina – to end (not standard = ku hetelela)
- ku zama – to try (not standard = ku ringeta)

## Writing system

---

### Xitsonga Latin Alphabet

Xitsonga uses the Latin alphabet. However, certain sounds are spelled using a combination of letters, which either do not exist in Indo-European languages, or may be meant to distinguish the language somewhat.

An example of this is the letter "x" taken from Portuguese orthography, which is pronounced /ʃ/. Therefore, the following words, [ʃuʃa], [ʃikolo], [ʃilo], are written in Tsonga as -xuxa, xikolo, and xilo.

Other spelling differences include the letter "c", which is pronounced /tʃ/. However, where the emphasis of a word is on the following vowel the letter is hardened by adding "h" this the Tsonga word -chava (fear)

A sound equivalent to the Welsh "ll" (/ɬ/) is written "hl" in Tsonga, e.g. -hlangana (meet), -hlasela (attack), -hleka (laugh)

A whistling sound common in the language is written "sw" or "sv" in Zimbabwean ChiShona. This sound actually belongs to the "x-sw" class within the language. E.g.:

- sweswi (now)
- xilo (thing) – swilo (things)
- xikolo (school) – swikolo (schools)
- Xikwembu (God) – swikwembu (gods)

Another whistling sound is spelled "dy" but has no English equivalent, the closest being the "dr" sound in the English word "drive"


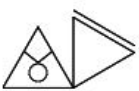
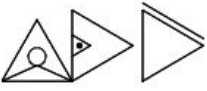



Xitsonga has been standardised as a written language. However, there are many dialects within the language that may not pronounce words as written. For example, the Tsonga bible uses the word "byela" (tell), pronounced bwe-la, however a large group of speakers would say "dzvela" instead.

The Lord's Prayer as written in the Xitsonga Bible (Bibele)

Tata wa hina la nge matilweni,  
vito ra wena a ri hlawuriwe;  
a ku te ku fuma ka wena;  
ku rhandza ka wena a ku endliwe misaveni;  
tani hi loko ku endliwa matilweni;  
u hi nyika namuntlha vuswa bya hina  
bya siku rin'wana ni rin'wana;  
u hi rivalela swidyoho swa hina,  
tani hi loko na hina hi rivalela lava hi dyohelaka;  
u nga hi yisi emiringweni  
kambe u hi ponisa eka Lowo biha,  
hikuva ku fuma, ni matimba, ni ku twala i swa wena  
hi masiku ni masiku.  
Amen.

## Xiyinhlanharhu xa Mipfawulo

The *sintu* writing system, *Isibheqe Sohlamvu/Ditema tsa Dinoko*, also known technically in Xitsonga as *Xiyinhlanharhu xa Mipfawulo*,<sup>[9]</sup> is used for all Xitsonga varieties. The class 7/8 noun pairs above are represented as follows:

<b>xilo</b>	 [ʃi : ɭɔ]	<b>swilo</b>	 [ʃi : ɭɔ]
<b>xikolo</b>	 [ʃik'ɔ : ɭɔ]	<b>swikolo</b>	 [ʃik'ɔ : ɭɔ]
<b>xikwembu</b>	 [ʃikw'ɛmbu]	<b>swikwembu</b>	 [ʃikw'ɛmbu]

## References

1. Tsonga (<https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/tso/>) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)

2. Webb, Vic. 2002. "Language in South Africa: the role of language in national transformation, reconstruction and development". *Impact: Studies in language and society*, 14:78
3. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Tsonga" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/tson1249>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
4. Jouni Filip Maho, 2009. New Updated Guthrie List Online (<https://web.archive.org/web/20180203191542/http://goto.glocalnet.net/mahopapers/nuglonline.pdf>)
5. Junod, Henry (1912, 1927), *The Life of a South African Tribe: The Social Life*, Neuchatel: Imprimerie Attinger Freres, p. 32–33
6. Harries, P. 1987, The Roots of Ethnicity: Discourse and the Politics of Language Construction in South-East Africa, University of the Witwatersrand. p. 16
7. Elephant Coast, (2009). History of the Thembe - Thonga, Retrieved from [http://www.visitelephantcoast.co.za/index.php?history\\_thembe](http://www.visitelephantcoast.co.za/index.php?history_thembe)
8. Baumbach, E. J. M. (1987). *Analytical Tsonga Grammar*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
9. "IsiBheqe" (<http://www.isibheqe.org>). isibheqe.org. 23 August 2015. Retrieved 28 August 2015.

---

## Further reading

- van Wyk, E. B.; Odendal, F. F.; Nkatini, N. L. (2012) [1988], "Comparison between the phonetic systems of Afrikaans and Tsonga", *South African Journal of Linguistics*, *Taylor & Francis Group*, 7 (1): 38–45, doi:[10.1080/10118063.1989.9723787](https://doi.org/10.1080/10118063.1989.9723787) (<https://doi.org/10.1080%2F10118063.1989.9723787>)

---

## External links

### Software and localisation

- PanAfriL10n page on Tsonga (<http://www.bisharat.net/wikidoc/pmwiki.php/PanAfrLoc/Tsonga>)
- Tsonga on translatewiki.net
- Xitsonga Online Dictionary on Xitsonga.org (<https://www.xitsonga.org>)

---

Retrieved from "[https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tsonga\\_language&oldid=963715477](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tsonga_language&oldid=963715477)"

---

This page was last edited on 21 June 2020, at 11:12 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#). Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the [Wikimedia Foundation, Inc.](#), a non-profit organization.